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A Look Back: Navy Medicine in 1914

Filed under [HOSPITALS](#), [LEADERSHIP](#), [NAVY HISTORY](#) (NO COMMENTS)

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Navy nurses stand in front of the Administration Building at Naval Hospital Washington, D.C. In 1914, there were 135 nurses serving in the U.S. Navy. (BUMED Library and Archives)

As the twentieth century’s first “[Great War](#)” erupted on the European stage the United States held to a policy of “strict neutrality” under President [Woodrow Wilson](#).






In 1914, the American population numbered 99, 111,000 people across 48 states. The year was marked by many “firsts” in this country including the first Mother’s Day (9 May), the first electric traffic signal (5 August), the first mail delivery by automobile (19 Oct), [the first appearances of the Tastykake](#) in Philadelphia, Pa., and slugger Babe Ruth in a major league game (ironically as a pitcher for the Boston Red Sox!) Few movies were more popular that year than Keystone comedies, and none was bigger than the first six-reel feature film, “Tillie’s Punctured Romance” starring Charlie Chaplin, Mabel Normand and Marie Dressler. Popular books of 1914 included James Joyce’s *The Dubliners*; *The Adventures of Peter Cottontail* by ecologist Thornton Burgess; and the pulp novels of Edgar Rice Burroughs featuring characters “John Carter” and “Tarzan.” Alex Guinness, Dylan Thomas, Jonas Salk, Joe DiMaggio, Hedy Lamarr, and Joe Louis were all born in 1914.

Navy Medical Department in 1914

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In 1914, as the “[world war](#)” commenced “over there,” the [Navy Medical Department](#) remained a small peacetime organization consisting of 21 active duty dentists, 1,437 hospital corpsmen, 135 nurses, and 311 physicians.^[2] The Navy operated 19 hospitals stateside and abroad in Annapolis, Md.; Brooklyn, N.Y.; Cañacao, P.I.; Chelsea, Mass.; Great Lakes, Ill.; Guam; Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; Las Animas, Colo.; Mare Island, Calif.; Narragansett Bay, R.I.; Norfolk, Va.; Olongapo, P.I.; Philadelphia, Pa.; Port Royal, S.C.; Portsmouth, N.H.; Puget Sound, Wash.; Tutuila, America Samoa; Washington, D.C.; and Yokohama, Japan.



Navy Surgeon's Parlor, Naval Hospital
Portsmouth, N.H., August 1914. (BUMED
Library and Archives)

The New Surgeon General



Rear Adm. William Braisted became the new Surgeon General of the Navy on Feb 7, 1914. Here he is at his Bureau of Medicine and Surgery office then located in the Mills Building at 17th and Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D.C. (Naval History and Heritage Command)

Rear Adm. [William Braisted](#), a former Atlantic Fleet Surgeon and [White House](#) Physician, was appointed the 15th Surgeon General of the Navy Feb. 7, 1914.

During his tenure (1914-1920), Braisted established special training schools for the Hospital Corps, oversaw the construction of USS *Relief* (the only Navy ship built specifically for use as a floating hospital) and steered the [Medical Department](#) through World War I.

Braisted Favors Recreational Facilities in the Navy

In his first Annual Report, Rear Adm. [William Braisted](#) makes note of value of recreational clubs and activities in the Navy. “In Samoa an enlisted men’s club has been organized, and the medical officer states that its value can not be overestimated. It affords various means of amusement, such as magazines and newspapers, player piano, Victrola, pool tables, and bowling alleys. In the Atlantic Reserve Fleet a compartment on the *Mississippi* was set aside for recreation purposes and this was the subject of commendation by the medical officer because of its good effect in increasing contentment and improving the morale.”^[3]

The Navy Enters the “Dry Dock”

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In his third year as Secretary of the Navy, [Josephus Daniels](#) issued “General Order 99” prohibiting the consumption of alcoholic beverages on board all Navy ships and at Navy stations. The one exception to this rule is made in the case of ship doctors who are allowed to maintain a limited supply of spirits on hand for medical purposes.[\[4\]](#)

Hospital Corps Training

After three years without a basic school of instruction, [BUMED](#) established the Hospital Corps School Newport, R.I. (June 1914) to prepare hospital corpsmen in subjects anatomy, physiology, minor surgery, hygiene and sanitation, clerical work, chemistry, material medica and pharmacy. Coinciding with this school’s establishment was the publication of the first edition of the *Hospital Corps Handbook*. Originally known as the “*Handy-Book of the Hospital Corps*” this 194-page “ready reference” was designed to be used by hospital corpsmen under instruction as well those throughout the service.[\[5\]](#)



Portrait of Hospital Apprentice First Class William Zuiderveld (1888-1978), Medal of Honor Recipient for actions at Veracruz, Mexico. William Zuiderveld retired as a Lieutenant in the Hospital Corps on August 31, 1945. (BUMED Library and Archives)

Typhoid Mary of the U.S. Navy

Although typhoid cases had reached a record low of 13 in 1914, Navy physicians identify a naval officer as a carrier of typhoid germs. The name of this officer is never publicly released and he was placed on the retired list for physical disability during the year.[\[6\]](#)

Leading Cause of Death

In 1914, the leading causes of death for Navy and Marine Corps personnel were: Drowning (42), Tuberculosis (38), Pneumonia (33) and Gunshot wounds (30).[\[7\]](#)

[Navy Medicine](#) Heroics at Tampico

On April 21, 1914, U.S. Sailors and Marines skirmish with Mexican forces at Tampico leading to a six-month occupation of Veracruz, Mexico. [\[8\]](#) Two Navy physicians (Surgeons Middleton Elliott and Cary Langhorne) and one hospital corpsman (William Zuiderveld) are awarded the Medal of Honor for their role in this engagement.

Navy Medicine Establishes Operations in [San Diego](#)

On July 10, 1914, LCDR Ulyss Webb, MC, USN (1874-1947)[\[9\]](#) established the 4th Marine Regiment Field Hospital on North Island, San Diego, Calif. This would mark the beginning of [Navy Medicine’s](#) 100 year history in [San Diego](#).[\[10\]](#)

August 2011 (16)
July 2011 (10)

Footnotes:

1. Kane, Joseph Nathan. *Famous First Facts: A Record of First Happenings, Discoveries and Inventions in the United States* (Third Edition). New York: The H.W. Wilson Company. 1964.
2. Hospital Corps consisted of 24 Chief Pharmacists and pharmacists, 285 hospital stewards, 563 hospital apprentices first class and 565 hospital apprentices. Personnel numbers are from June 1914 and obtained from the *Annual Report of the Surgeon General, U.S. Navy Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery to the Secretary of the Navy for the Fiscal Year 1914*. Washington, DC. 1914. The Dental Corps number is calculated on the personnel allotted and number of vacancies in 1914.
3. *Annual Report*, 1914. pp14-15
4. "American Navy is Now 'Dry': No More Can Main Brace be Properly Spliced." *Los Angeles Times*: Jul 1, 1914. p16.
5. "Development of Service Instruction." *Hospital Corps Quarterly*, April-May-June 1948. Washington, DC: Government printing Office. p40.
6. "Naval Officer Menace to Comrades, Carrying for Years Germs of Typhoid." *The Washington Post*; Jun 25, 1914.
7. *Annual Report*, 1915. p14.
8. When a working party from the USS *Dolphin* went ashore on the port city of Tampico on 9 April 1914, they were arrested for "trespassing." Even though they were released soon after with "expressed regrets," Rear Adm. Henry T. Mayo, Fleet Commander, demanded a formal apology from the Mexicans, along the lines of "publicly hoisting the American Flag in a prominent position on shore and saluting it with 21 guns." Mayo allotted 24 hours for this act. Mexican dictator Victoriano Huerta offered a note of regret but demanded that the order be withdrawn. These "indignities," would lead to a three-day skirmish and a six-month occupation of the region.
9. Dr. Ulyss Webb would spend 37 years in the Navy retiring in 1938 as a Rear Admiral.
10. The Regiment Hospital relocated to the Panama-California Exposition Grounds (Balboa Park) on 15 December 1914. In 1917, the hospital was renamed the "War Dispensary"; and in 1919, Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels redesignated it "Naval Hospital San Diego, Calif."

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